

Postal strike special MILITANT

Published by the Socialist Workers Party
and the Young Socialist Alliance

Price 10c



BACK THE POSTAL STRIKE

Embattled unionists are advancing cause of labor and all liberation forces

AN EDITORIAL

MARCH 24—President Nixon and the Congress are engaged in a massive effort to smash the postal workers' strike. They are using a show of federal-troop force and trying desperately to spark a back-to-work movement by conning each group of strikers into believing they are the "holdouts."

The government is doing this because it recognizes that it is dealing with something that goes far beyond an ordinary union struggle for better wages and conditions.

The postal workers are joining the growing forces of rebellion.

They are joining with those whose activity helped spur them to their present magnificent battle—the Black and Brown people who are demanding control of their destinies; the students who are demanding an education relevant to the messed up world they live in; the powerful forces demanding an end to the war; the women demanding their liberation.

Like all of these, the postal workers are declaring they have had enough of a rigged and rotten setup in which they consistently get the short, dirty end of the stick.

It's not simply that they're underpaid and overworked. They've been underpaid and overworked for years.

It's not simply that they have to moonlight more and more just to stay in the same place.

It's not simply that in addition to the on-the-job grievances, they're fed up with paying through prices, taxes and sons for the Vietnam war.

It's not simply that they pay more money for shoddier merchandise, endure worse transportation, breathe more polluted air.

It's not simply that they are sick and disgusted seeing a president and Congress allot themselves whopping salaries for doing nothing about the problems of working people except to make them worse.

It's simply that they have had enough of all of these things.

It's simply that the Afro-Americans, the students and all the other sectors of society fighting for their rights have persuaded the postal workers that they too have power, if they simply use it.

The action of these unionists is going to have a profound effect on other workers who are beginning to stir. Legions of American workers face the same basic problems as the postal workers. Tens of thousands of them will be negotiating new union contracts this year. Only the most fatheaded employer, or dim-witted union bureaucrat could believe that the action of the postal workers will not have an impact on the consciousness of their fellow unionists.

For these and other good and sufficient reasons, the postal strike deserves the full support of all labor. Concerned workers should stand up in their unions and demand action in support of these frontline fighters. The AFL-CIO, the Alliance for Labor Action, the railroad brotherhoods, the independent unions—all must be mobilized behind the postal workers. If the situation should reach the point of demanding a general strike against government union-busting, that should be demanded too.

And surely the postal workers deserve the enthusiastic support of the Black, Brown and Third World movements, the students, the antiwar movement, the women's movement, all those who fight for a new and better world.

The men and women of the Post Office have destroyed the notion that workers are "bought off," incapable of struggle. They are demonstrating the mighty power held by the ranks of labor—the power to strike hammer blows at a bankrupt social system.

Strike interviews

'Nobody's gonna move the mail'

By JOSEPH BROWN

Out in front of the main post office in Manhattan where nearly 1000 striking postal workers gathered Monday afternoon, quiet fell over the crowd as President Nixon's speech began. Workers huddled around transistor radios, muttering, hooting and occasionally snickering as President Nixon announced that he would not settle until the strikers returned to work.

"This is real bullshit," muttered a Black worker.

"What does he think we are?" asked another. "A bunch of fools?"

"He's a goddamn liar," continued the first. "How can the American public stand that SOB? I wish to hell the whole country goes out on strike."

Nixon's speech ends. There's a scattering of boos and laughter. Dozens of hands shoot into the air in the form of the "V" for victory.

"To hell with Tricky Dick," someone shouts.

A postal clerk says the workers won't buckle. "The speech was a distortion of facts," he says. "They'll never break the strike."

"I think we're getting a bunch of double-talk," said a Black postal employee. "Nixon claims that two years ago he was cognizant of the problems. Now he wants to defer a raise until 1971 because it's inflationary."

"We're all standing firm," was John Kavanagh's first reaction to Nixon's speech.

Kavanagh has been working for the Post Office in New York for 16 years. "We'll go back to work when we get something substantial," he said.

Samuel Rock, a Black postal worker, has been employed by the Post Office for seven years. "It was nothing but a snow job," he said of Nixon's speech. "Nobody's gonna move the mails."

"They think it's so important to move the mails," says a friend. "I wish they thought our pay was as important. You get \$5,000 a year, and it takes \$10,000 to live."

John Broderick is 18 years old and Black. He boxes mail and he has worked at the main post office in Manhattan for four months. What was his reaction to Nixon's speech?

"I don't think it was much," says Broderick. "It was a lot of sweet talk. He said when he was running for president that he'd quit the war. Well, he didn't. We should get out."

"Nixon's for bringing the troops in here?" says a Black postal clerk. "Why didn't he bring in the troops when those whites beat up on those Black school kids in Lamar, South Carolina?"

A Puerto Rican mail clerk vowed that it would take 90 days for the Guard to learn how to put one letter in a mailbox.

"They need skilled labor to move the mails. And the skilled labor is out here on the street," he said.

"Where are you from?" the Puerto Rican worker asks.

"The Militant."

He leans over and whispers into *The Militant* reporter's ear, "Free the Panther 21!"

Moe Biller, president of the union, is giving a sidewalk news conference to a local television station.

"I want the public to know," Billings says, "that the postal workers have been driven like cattle out onto the streets."

Said Biller: "They're negotiating with people who don't represent a paper bag."

Wooden police barricades were erected in midafternoon to keep workers from congregating en masse in front of the post office.

"Huelga," shouts a postal worker. How long will he stay out, he's asked. "Until hell freezes over," he says.

The man has three children and a wife to support, he says, and he earns a little over \$7,000 a year. Does he have any money in the bank?

(Continued next page)



Meaning of postal workers' strike

By FRANK LOVELL

MARCH 24—The strike of New York City letter carriers on March 18, which spread rapidly across the nation, paralyzing the postal service and causing panic in the international business world, reveals a new mood in the ranks and demonstrates the power of the working class.

It should come as no surprise that the workers' mood, their general attitude toward the government of this country, their judgment of the employing class, and their view of their assigned position in this society, now show signs of radical change. This change of feeling and general outlook on the part of broad sectors of the working class is brought on by the daily deteriorating conditions of life, which accompany the unraveling of the whole tangled skein of dubious moral and social values of capitalist society.

The immediate cause of this change in attitude of millions of workers and the new mood of defiance, is the sharp downturn in real wages resulting from inflation and the consequent decline in the standard of living. But the general feeling has been growing for the past four years—since 1966—that something is wrong and that the employers, the greedy price-gougers, their political servitors in the Republican and Democratic parties, and maybe even the government itself, are to blame.

The loss in real wages, which has just begun to affect most industrial workers, has already become a catastrophe for the postal workers. They are employees of the government, denied the right to strike for higher wages. And the result

is that their pay is so far below the national standard that seven percent of letter carriers in New York City receive welfare to augment their wages.

Thousands more work a second job. They must because their starting pay is only \$6,176 a year, and if they stay 21 years they can make top scale of \$8,442. This explains why the letter carriers stopped making their appointed rounds.

This strike, perhaps more dramatically than any other in the history of this country, demonstrated the power of the working class. Suddenly the mails stopped, and with that many other things stopped too. It was not simply that letters no longer came. Business ground to a halt.

The daily exchange of goods in this commodity-producing society depends to a large extent upon the postal sys-

Everyone, almost, got a new appreciation of the mailman's importance, including the postal workers themselves.

In union meetings across the country, postal workers, on Sat., March 21, met in huge mass meetings to hear and reject a scheme hatched in Washington between top officials of seven postal unions and high-ranking government men to get all workers back in the post office on Monday morning without guaranteeing higher wages. Nearly 200,000 workers were involved, according to government estimates.

These postal workers showed their determination to use the power of their new-found weapon—the right to strike—and they repudiated all efforts of the top union bureaucrats in Washington to stand as intermediaries between them and their employer. They were prepared in their mass meeting, feeling the strength of their numbers and being fully aware of their strategic importance to the men with the money, to take on all opposition that stood in the way of higher wages and a better life for themselves and their families—including the United States government.

The response of the government and of other leading spokesmen among the rulers of this country was characteristically callous and brutal. The scheme of such top union leaders as the national president of the Letter Carriers, James H. Rademacher, drafted at the urging of Secretary of Labor George P. Shultz, and submitted to the postal workers as an "agreement" which they should accept, was an obvious fraud. There was no agreement of any kind. The Secretary of Labor simply announced that there would be no negotiations until the workers returned to their jobs. He demanded of them that they drop their strike weapon, surrender their favorable

bargaining position, and then negotiate the conditions of further surrender. This was immediately recognized, branded and rejected.

When it became clear that the postal workers refused to surrender, Nixon called his March 21 press conference to issue the now famous dictum: "On Monday I will meet my constitutional obligation to see to it that the mails will go through."

All three branches of the government, plus the administrative machinery, brought pressure upon the strikers. The president with his threat to deploy the Army; the Congress by its refusal to pass on wage increases for postal employees and its insistence that the strikers return to work before giving consideration to their plight; and the judiciary through the issuance of injunctions by federal judges in Philadelphia and Detroit—all combined in an attempt to crush the strike and drive the workers back into the post offices.

Not one single politician in the Republican or Democratic parties has given primacy to the admittedly just demands of postal workers or whispered a single word in support of the strike. All, without exception, urged the strikers to get back on the job . . . and quickly.

The *New York Times*, one of the most authoritative spokesmen of Big Business in matters of labor-management relations, thundered its disapproval of the strike in daily editorials from the first moment. Especially irate after postal workers turned down Labor Secretary Shultz's fake "agreement," the *Times* fulminated against the "outrageous repudiation," "the irresponsibility of their actions . . .," threatening that "the postal workers' defiance is one that menaces all of organized labor. It symbolizes in most acute form the flight from authority that has caused rank-and-file rebels to upset one out of every



James Rademacher, non-fighting president of Nat'l Ass'n of Letter Carriers

tem. The managers of business and finance know all about this, but they have taken the postal system for granted for so long that they have tended to forget it. Their indifference is imparted to a certain extent to the general populace. The man who quietly brings the mail each day had come to be taken so for granted that he was hardly noticed—until the dog started barking.

All this changed the day the postmen walked off the job. Millions learned for the first time how important these postal workers are. On March 20, the *New York Times* reported that as "the strike entered its third day, there were serious disruptions in the business community."

"Avalanches of mail destined for New York were accumulating at out-of-town post offices. No mail has entered the city since Postmaster General Winton M. Blount imposed an embargo Wednesday to save local post offices from being swamped."

Business was immediately affected. "The situation appeared to be deteriorating so rapidly on Wall Street that there were fears that the entire securities industry might have to shut down on Monday if the strike continued."

"Checks, stock certificates, bonds and other financial papers that, in the mails, represent cash in motion were unavailable to the banks and brokerage houses that needed them to complete transactions and clear records for the orderly continuation of business," according to the *Times*.

Industry likewise suffered, some firms closed for the duration. Publishing houses that depend upon daily orders sent the employees home at the end of the week to be called back later when the mails were untangled.

Postal strikers in Chicago hit bricks in fighting mood

By CLEMENS BAK and JOHN STUDER

CHICAGO, March 23—As part of a chain reaction produced by the strike of New York postal workers, over 30,000 Chicago postal employees hit the bricks.

Led by the more than 6,000 strong Chicago letter carriers, postal service has ground to a halt all throughout the Chicago area and picket lines of up to 100 have been set up at every branch post office in the city.

Over 4,000 workers attended the strike meeting March 20 and the mood was high. The union president opened the meeting by proposing that carriers continue working on the basis of the five-day cooling off period negotiated with the Labor Department by the union's national leadership.

He was literally booed off the stage.

On Saturday, the Chicago Student Mobilization Committee met and voted to mobilize antiwar students to support the strike. In announcing its support, the SMC stated that while the government seemingly can't pay the workers a living wage, it is able to pour \$80-million a day into the war in Vietnam.

The SMC called on antiwar activists to demonstrate their support to the strike by coming out to a rally Wed., March 25 at the main post office. Already thousands of leaflets are out to college campuses and high schools.

The postal workers' response to the projected demonstration is good. The connection between the war and the strike is recognized by the bulk of the strikers, as indicated by one sign carried by one of the picketers: "Nixon,

you send troops into Vietnam, you send troops into Laos, now you're going to send troops into the post office. Nixon, you eat s. . ."

One striker told newmen: "I've been working two jobs for 15 years now just to survive. I'm tired of working 16 hours a day. I'm a waiter when I finish my job which means I spend 16 hours a day on my feet. After our last raise in July, I ended up taking home a dollar less than before the raise. State income tax took it."

Since there are no professional picket signs, strikers carry signs made of sheets of cardboard bearing slogans printed with magic markers. All are militant. One sign that summarizes the mood compared the wage increase Congress granted itself to the situation of the strikers:

"Scoreboard:
President Nixon: 100 percent;
Senate: 40 percent;
Carriers: 0 percent."

Naomi Allen, Illinois Socialist Workers Party candidate for U.S. Senate, walked the picket lines with the strikers. She issued a statement to the press supporting the strikers, endorsing the SMC demonstration and attacking Nixon's threat to send in troops to cart the mail.

As of Monday morning the determination of the strikers remained high and their resolve to stay out until they win their demands remained solid. One Chicago reporter wrote: "The pickets, most of them Black, vowed they would stay out as long as they needed to win pay raises. The threat of prison scared no one. 'What's new about a Black man going to jail?' demanded an elderly picket."

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Strikers at New York Post Office

Photo by Dick Roberts

eight agreements negotiated in good faith by their leaders—a development that strikes at the integrity of the bargaining process."

There, in the crude actions of the administration, the president, the Congress and the courts—brazenly endorsed by the even more crude logic of an apoplectic press—the prevailing attitudes, aims and methods of the ruling class in this country are revealed.

When this government is confronted, as every employer must be, with the demand for higher wages by those it hires and to whom it pays substandard wages, this "impartial" institution looks and acts like very other employer. And how could it be otherwise?

The congressmen themselves are all rich men, members of the employing class, servitors of that class, or hangers-on seeking a payoff from that class.

The august judges receive their appointments to the high bench only after they have been tested and proven to be staunch defenders of the privileges of the ruling class.

And the president, who is he? Nixon is not part of the working class, and has never shown any sympathy for workers.

The striking postmen have exposed the myth of "impartial" government. Simply by insisting that their employers pay them living wages, they have revealed the truth for all to see that this government is part of, belongs to, and serves the employing class.

They have demonstrated once again that everything depends upon the workers. Without the skilled labor of the postal workers the internal functioning of the greatest military power in the world is paralyzed in a few days. During World War II the miners taught the Roosevelt administration that you can't dig coal with bayonets. It may yet be necessary for the mail sorters to teach Nixon that you can't deliver mail with bayonets.

This does not mean that this postal strike is the beginning of the final showdown between capital and labor.

What it does reveal is that the working class is disenchanted with the status quo. As the lords of the press have so eloquently described it, "The unthinkable has happened." This would not have occurred if the postal workers had not sensed the complete sympathy of all workers, and this sympathy has been universally expressed on every hand by the rank and file of labor throughout the course of the strike.

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sition is made from union consciousness to political class consciousness.

It is being demonstrated in the course of these events that there is no such thing as a capitalist politician who is a friend of labor. The capitalist politician is labor enemy number two, just once removed from the boss whom he serves at all times.

The circumstances of the postal strike make this axiom self-evident. Today postmen face the president and the Republican administration who have called in the Army and "use force to deliver the mail." Today postmen face a Democratic Congress (both houses) who support the Republican president and "use force to deliver the mail." Today postmen face the courts (appointed judges of past administrations and local political machines, a mixture of both Democrats and Republicans), who "use force to deliver the mail."

Postmen are lied to, double-crossed, coerced. The healthiest instincts of every working man and woman dictate the inescapable conclusion: Capitalist politicians lie.

It often happens when strikers are double-crossed by politicians whom they consider "friends of labor" that they turn as if by instinct to the idea of a labor party. This happened in 1966 in the case of the striking airplane mechanics (members of the International Association of Machinists) when Congress threatened to pass antistrike legislation.

At that time these strikers passed resolutions demanding that their union "take immediate action to form a third political party that will serve the best interests of labor." Not unexpectedly, nothing happened. A labor party will not be formed simply because a group of strikers pass a resolution demanding it.

Much has happened during the past four years, most importantly the change in mood of the working class. The recognition of the need for a labor party is now a natural development from the circumstances of the postal workers strike, pitted as they are against the politicians of both the Democratic and Republican parties and that institution, the government, with which they are identified and which they represent as a strikebreaking agency.

The candidates of the Socialist Workers Party, now campaigning in all sections of this country, are the only candidates for public office who unconditionally support the striking postal workers and who urge the formation of a labor party based on the trade union movement.



Militancy and solidarity throughout

Photo by Dick Roberts

SWP candidates back strikers across country



Herman Fagg, Socialist Workers Party candidate for governor of California.

The national headquarters of the 1970 Socialist Workers Party election campaigns issued a statement March 23 in support of the striking postal workers and denouncing President Nixon's decision to use military personnel in an attempt to break the strike. The statement said in part:

"For decades the Democratic and Republican politicians have been posing as the so-called "friends of labor." But these same politicians vote themselves a 41 percent wage increase and scream about "inflation" and "illegal strikes" when the postal workers, with far more justification, seek a 41 percent increase of their miserable wages.

"Nixon hypocritically condemns the postal workers who are fighting for a living wage, accusing them of coercion—while he calls out the military! The administration and the Republican and Democratic politicians deceitfully warn against "inflationary wage settlements" while spawning inflation by squandering more than \$80 million a day on their war in Vietnam—a war which the majority of the American people oppose. The postal workers have been forced to pay for that war out of their own pockets, and when they protest, taking action to gain a wage on which they can live, the "friends of labor"—who would outlaw every strike if they could get away with it—try to ignore the postal workers' just demands by talking about 'illegal' strikes."

The Socialist Workers Party candidates across the country have declared their unconditional support for the strike, and call on the labor movement to come to the aid of the postal workers. "The unions of the AFL-CIO and the Alliance for Labor Action must make their strike funds available to the postal workers and demand that the troops be withdrawn immediately from New York.

"The Black and Third World liberation movements, the student and anti-war movements and other forces must come to the aid of the striking workers, mobilizing support for them.

"And the troops who are being used against their own interests and wishes must have the right to exercise their constitutional liberties, the right to organize and express their opinions on the postal workers' strike.

"With the united power of the working class and its allies behind them, the postal workers will win their strike!"

just out

Life in an Auto Plant

By Tom Cagle 25c

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Postal unionists resisting gov't back-to-work moves

By MARVEL SCHOLL

NEW YORK, March 24—Following the call-out of federal troops to stampede postal workers back to the mail racks, the latest word on the almost-nationwide strike is that mailmen are still

Big N.Y. union backs strikers

NEW YORK, March 23—Within hours after Nixon's announcement of plans to use troops to move the mail, Victor Gotbaum, president of the powerful New York District Council 37 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, declared his support for the postal strikers. At a press conference, he said the postal unionists were fighting the battle of all municipal workers. He criticized other union leaders for failing to rally behind the strikers and scored Nixon for "wrapping himself in the flag" in attacking the strikers. He announced District 37 was contributing \$5,000 to the strike.

hanging tough in key cities—answering the government's ultimatum to go back to work with an ultimatum of their own—pay raises or no mail.

It was announced late last night that troops would enter the General Post Office here at 5:45 a.m. today. But when the hour struck 6:00 a.m. and no troops appeared, one of the strikers on hand to greet them concluded, "The Army must have got lost. If they can't find the post office, how can they sort mail?"

Given the attitudes expressed by many of the Guardsmen called upon to break the strike, Nixon's move won't be too successful. "It's pretty ridiculous," said one National Guardsman with a grin. He was on his way to a Guard meeting and was riding a New York City subway at 6:30 this morning.

"Do you think they'll move the mails?"

"No. In fact, I think it's pretty feasible for a guy to dump a sack of mail in the river and go off and drink beer for five hours."

"Do you think the strikers have legitimate grievances?"

"Yes," he said. "You know, the strike is pretty good in one way. The people are telling the president where to get off. They're striking against the government. Ten years ago, you tried to do something like that, they'd machinegun you."

It appears that the government strategy of using troops to frighten experienced workers back into the post office is not going to work.

Atlanta city workers fight strikebreakers

By DOUG JENNESS

ATLANTA, March 23—About 2,500 city employees went out on strike here last Tuesday night, March 17, creating liberal Democratic Mayor Sam Massell's first major crisis since he took office in January.

The bulk of the striking workers are Black and work for the city's sanitation, public works and park departments and are members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local 1644.

Other members of the union not on strike include cafeteria and custodial employees in the city schools, and airport and hospital workers.

In an attempt to scare the workers back to work, Massell has asked Georgia's racist governor Lester Maddox to put the National Guard on alert, has sent letters to over 1,400 employees informing them that they are fired, placed ads in the newspapers to solicit scab labor, personally tried to lead scabs through picket lines, and is shortening the terms of city prisoners who volunteer to work as scabs.

Although some employees have returned to work, most of them are standing fast and are continuing to maintain the picket lines.

The issues involved in the strike center around the abysmally low wages paid to city employees. In December the workers demanded a three-step increase in wages and were granted only a two-step increase.

In negotiations between the city administration and the AFSCME leaders on March 17—an agreement was reached whereby the current minimum wage of \$1.67 would be raised to \$2.13 per hour and all workers would receive free \$5,000 life-insurance policies.

Raising the minimum wage would

SMC urges campus action

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The national office of the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam called on antiwar students across the country to mobilize mass student support for the striking postal workers. "This strike is an extension of the fight we are waging today to end the war in Vietnam. . . . Broadly sponsored mass meetings should be held on campuses across the country to discuss student support for the strike. Mass demonstrations, campus actions and mass leafleting are all tools that the antiwar movement and the student movement can use to help the workers in their struggle."

affect only 100 employees and the insurance policies would do nothing to provide the necessary money the employees need to offset the rising cost of living.

When union leaders brought this proposal to a mass meeting of workers Tuesday night it was unanimously rejected and the workers went on strike.

In a letter sent to Mayor Massell, Linda Jenness, Socialist Workers Party candidate for governor, stated: "One of the messages of my election campaign for mayor last year was to urge the labor movement and the Black community to watch out for and to oppose liberal Democrats like you.

"Unfortunately, you won the support of the labor movement and the Black community in the last elections. But now, less than three months after you took office you are losing their support. . . .

"It is becoming clear to thousands of Atlanta citizens which side you are on and, quite frankly, I believe it's the wrong side."

She went on to indicate that she feels many Atlanta workers and Black Atlantans will be drawing lessons about breaking from the Democratic Party politicians and supporting a Black party and an independent labor party.

Although there is widespread support for the strike, especially in the Black community, other unions have not given more than verbal support as of yet.

A support march to City Hall will be held on Wednesday, March 25, where the letters firing the workers will be returned to Mayor Massell. Another march and rally to City Hall is scheduled for Saturday, March 28, at 10 a.m.

Chi rail unionists pledge support

CHICAGO, March 24—Railroad union leaders in the Chicago area have issued a statement pledging their personal support of the national postal workers' strike and unconditionally opposing the use of federal troops as strikebreakers. The statement was issued by eight officers of the United Transportation Union, representing engineers, firemen, conductors, brakemen and switchmen. They included Robert W. Groah, UTU general chairman for the Belt Railway of Chicago and seven other chairmen of UTU locals in the Chicago region.

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